

## United States Senate

March 26, 2020

The Honorable David Bernhardt  
Secretary  
Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20240

David Vela  
Deputy Director  
National Park Service  
Department of Interior  
900 Ohio Drive S.W.  
Washington, DC 20024

Jean Fraser  
The Presidio Trust  
103 Montgomery Street  
P.O. Box 29052  
San Francisco, CA 94129

Dear Secretary Bernhardt, Deputy Director Vela and Ms. Fraser:

It has come to my attention that a number of units of the U.S. National Park Service in California remain open, notwithstanding the urgent threat of COVID-19, and that these continued operations have put serious strains on the operational effectiveness and endangered the public health of the United States Park Police (USPP).

In order to ensure the safety of California residents and visitors—as well as the officers and staff that maintain the safety and operation of our national park units—we urge you to immediately issue guidance to temporarily close all national park units within the State of California, for the duration of California’s declared state of emergency.

Since Governor Newsom issued his statewide stay-at-home order earlier this month, California’s public spaces have experienced historically large gatherings, compared to this time last year. As a result, many cities have closed public spaces, including beaches and parks.

The recent increase in visitors has further strained already understaffed national park units in California. The USPP has been underfunded for years and barely has the staffing needed to maintain what the USPP Management has labeled “Minimum Staffing.” This means that the USPP has not been able to take the same precautions and measures that other national police forces have taken to respond to the operational challenges presented by COVID-19.

For example, the United States Capitol Police (USCP) and the United States Secret Service (USSS) Uniformed Division have altered their work schedules and have undertaken special staffing procedures – like Administrative Leave, in addition to other measures – to limit their officers' exposure to COVID-19.

Should there be COVID-19 exposure on a USPP shift, this could effectively prevent a majority of the officers on that shift from being able to work, thus leaving the USPP with no means of maintaining even minimal staffing levels.

Your offices should have received a letter dated on March 23, 2020, from the Fraternal Order of Police, U.S. Park Police Labor Committee, that raises these concerns. While I understand that park closures are normally determined by each Superintendent, this crisis is one that necessitates leadership. I urge you to listen to these concerns and immediately issue guidance temporarily closing all national park units in the State of California, until California public health officials deem reopening safe again. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Kamala D. Harris', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Kamala D. Harris  
United States Senator